

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Jerome S. Garcia,)	C/A No.: 3:21-1359-JMC-SVH
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	
)	
Richland County Sheriff's)	ORDER AND NOTICE
Department; Calhoun County)	
Sheriff's Department; South)	
Carolina Department of Public)	
Safety State Troopers,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

Jerome S. Garcia (“Plaintiff”), proceeding pro se, filed this complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Richland County Sheriff’s Department (“RCSD”), Calhoun County Sheriff’s Department (“CCSD”), and South Carolina Department of Public Safety State Troopers (“SCDPS”) (collectively “Defendants”). Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) and Local Civ. Rule 73.02(B)(2)(d) (D.S.C.), the undersigned is authorized to review such complaints for relief and submit findings and recommendations to the district judge.

I. Factual and Procedural Background

Plaintiff alleges South Carolina state actors and policies systemically discriminate against citizens of color. [ECF No. 1 at 2]. He states that he has

been arrested multiple times without due process. *Id.* at 3. Plaintiff references other civil cases he has brought in this court, traffic citations resulting in his arrest, and Family Court hearings in which he alleges he has been deprived of due process. He attaches various paperwork related to criminal proceedings against him. [ECF No. 1-1].

Although not succinctly stated in his complaint, the court can glean in this case and from Plaintiff's prior cases that he feels the policies and agencies of South Carolina are discriminatory against poor individuals. Plaintiff essentially complains that a child support debt has precluded him from obtaining a driver's license and that his inability to obtain a license interferes with his ability to work to provide for his family. Additionally, Plaintiff is upset that his inability to obtain a driver's license, insurance, and license plates have led to his arrest on multiple occasions. Plaintiff also disagrees with many rulings and orders by Family Court Judges.

II. Discussion

A. Standard of Review

Plaintiff filed his complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss a case upon a finding that the action fails to state a claim on which relief may

be granted or is frivolous or malicious. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i), (ii). A finding of frivolity can be made where the complaint lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 31 (1992). A claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed sua sponte under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). See *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 327 (1989).

A complaint must contain “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). Pro se complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys. *Gordon v. Leake*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978). In evaluating a pro se complaint, the plaintiff’s allegations are assumed to be true. *Fine v. City of N.Y.*, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2d Cir. 1975). The mandated liberal construction afforded to pro se pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so. A federal court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a pro se litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007).

The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts that set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387, 390–91 (4th Cir. 1990). Although the court must liberally construe a pro se complaint, the United States Supreme Court has made it

clear a plaintiff must do more than make conclusory statements to state a claim. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677–78 (2009); *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). Rather, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is plausible on its face, and the reviewing court need only accept as true the complaint's factual allegations, not its legal conclusions. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678–79.

B. Analysis

1. Conclusory and Vague Allegations

A complaint must contain “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). Although the court must liberally construe a pro se complaint, the United States Supreme Court has made it clear that a plaintiff must do more than make conclusory statements to state a claim. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677–78 (2009); *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). Rather, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is plausible on its face, and the reviewing court need only accept as true the complaint's factual allegations, not its legal conclusions. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678–79. Although Plaintiff may believe the State's policies as a whole result in discriminations, he must provide specific information as to how any particular policy is unconstitutional, rather than generally declaring it. Plaintiff's complaint does not contain sufficient factual allegations of

constitutional wrongdoing or discriminatory actions attributable to Defendants.

2. Sheriff's Departments and State Agencies are Not "Persons"

To state a plausible claim for relief under 42 U.S.C. § 1983,¹ an aggrieved party must sufficiently allege that he was injured by "the deprivation of any [of his or her] rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the [United States] Constitution and laws" by a "person" acting "under color of state law." *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1983; *see generally* 5 Charles Alan Wright & Arthur R. Miller, *Federal Practice and Procedure* § 1230 (3d ed. 2014). Only "persons" may act under color of state law; therefore, a defendant in a § 1983 action must qualify as a "person." Groups of individuals in a building, such as a sheriff's department, do not qualify as a "person" who can act under color of state law for purposes of § 1983. *See Kane v. Beaufort Cty Sheriffs Dep't*, C/A No. 9:14-508-RMG, 2015 WL 404570, at *6 n.2 (D.S.C. Jan. 29, 2015) (noting that "[a] department is not a person subject to suit under § 1983"). Similarly, state agencies are not considered a person pursuant to § 1983. *Will v. Mich. Dep't of State Police*, 491

¹ Plaintiff's complaint is before this court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Section 1983 is the procedural mechanism through which Congress provided a private civil cause of action based on allegations of federal constitutional violations by persons acting under color of state law. The purpose of § 1983 is to deter state actors from using badge of their authority to deprive individuals of their *federally guaranteed* rights and to provide relief to victims if such deterrence fails.

U.S. 58, 71 (1989) (holding that neither a State nor its officials acting in their official capacities are “persons” under § 1983). Here, Defendants are not considered “persons” subject to suit under § 1983, and Plaintiff’s complaint is subject to summary dismissal.

NOTICE CONCERNING AMENDMENT

Plaintiff may attempt to correct the defects in his complaint by filing an amended complaint by **June 4, 2021**, along with any appropriate service documents. Plaintiff is reminded an amended complaint replaces the original complaint and should be complete in itself. *See Young v. City of Mount Ranier*, 238 F.3d 567, 572 (4th Cir. 2001) (“As a general rule, an amended pleading ordinarily supersedes the original and renders it of no legal effect.”) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted). If Plaintiff files an amended complaint, the undersigned will conduct screening of the amended complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. If Plaintiff fails to file an amended complaint or fails to cure the deficiencies identified above, the undersigned will recommend to the district court that the claims specified above be dismissed without leave for further amendment.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

May 14, 2021
Columbia, South Carolina


Shiva V. Hodges
United States Magistrate Judge